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SUBJECT: ROMANIAN COMMITMENT REMAINS FIRM IN AFGHANISTAN
AND IRAQ

Classified By: Political Section Chief Robert Gilchrist
for Reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a recent press interview, Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu stated that Romania would reevaluate its troop presence in Iraq and Afghanistan at the end of 2006, adding that "for the time being, the Iraqi and Afghan armies are not capable of taking over the Romanian Army's mission." Some media reports January 26 emphasized that the GOR would consider withdrawing some of its troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007, citing Atanasiu's statement that "we will decide by the end of the year if we pull out part of our troops from the missions." Mihaela Matei, the Director of the MOD Strategic Affairs Directorate told PolMilOff January 26 that Romanian policy toward Afghanistan and Iraq was unchanged, underscoring that Romanian troops would remain in Iraq and Afghanistan until Iraqis and Afghans are able to ensure their own security. Referring to a "journalistic misinterpretation" of Atanasiu's remarks, she continued that Romania was not planning any unilateral withdrawals and that its 2006 deployments were accounted for in the current budget. She concluded by noting that "as in the U.S., Romania's interest is to progressively reduce its troops in the years to come...but will reduce troops (in Afghanistan and Iraq) only when they can take over their own security." In a separate discussion January 26, MFA USA and Canada Division Director Catalin Ionita stressed to PolMilOff that Romania's policy in Iraq and Afghanistan remained unchanged, observing that President Basescu stated "just a few days ago" that Romania would stay the course in Afghanistan and Iraq.

¶2. (C) Comment: Ionita was alluding to Basescu's widely-publicized January 20 remarks to diplomats accredited in Bucharest in which Basescu stated that Romania "will maintain all (its) previously assumed commitments. Romania will not diminish its participation either in Iraq, in Afghanistan or in the Western Balkans...As far as Iraq is concerned, I should like to mention something: the Romanian troops will remain in Iraq until the Iraqi government requires Romania to withdraw its troops from Iraqi soil...A potential withdrawal of the Romanian troops from Iraq can take place at the request of the government in Baghdad and in full agreement with our allies in Iraq." Basescu has privately and publicly expressed the same sentiments on numerous prior occasions. That said, Romanian interlocutors, including Basescu and DefMin Atanasiu, have told us they would welcome an opportunity to reduce the Romanian troop presence in Afghanistan and Iraq - but only when the security situation warrants a reduction and only after consultation with allies. Indeed, in Afghanistan, Romania is taking on increased responsibilities under ISAF. End Comment.

¶3. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest
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